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RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(B), 1.4(D)PAGE 01 CARACA 00184 01 OF 02 202040Z
ACTION WHA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	ACQ-01	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00
	DS-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-01	ADS-00	NSAE-00
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000184

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/20/09
TAGS: OVIP, PREL, VE
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT TO WASHINGTON OF PRESIDENT-ELECT
HUGO CHAVEZ

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN F. MAISTO. REASON: 1.5 (D).

BACKGROUND

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1. (C) HUGO CHAVEZ'S JANUARY 27-28 VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES, AND HIS JANUARY 27 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CLINTON, IS THE TOP PRIORITY OF THE PRESIDENT-ELECT. THIS VISIT WILL FULFILL AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL GOAL AND A DEEP-FELT NEED OF THE PRESIDENT-ELECT TO BE ACCEPTED BY HIS COUNTRY'S MAJOR TRADE PARTNER AND PRINCIPAL POLITICAL INTERLOCUTOR.

2. (C) ELECTED IN A LANDSLIDE ON DECEMBER 6, HUGO CHAVEZ CAMPAIGNED AS AN IMPLACABLE FOE OF CORRUPTION WHO PROMISED RADICAL POLITICAL CHANGE. HIS MESSAGE, DELIVERED IN SHARP, AGGRESSIVE RHETORIC, RESONATED DEEPLY IN AN ELECTORATE DISTRESSED BY ECONOMIC RECESSION, INFLATION, COLLAPSING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND SERVICES, AND THE CYNICISM AND CORRUPTION OF VENEZUELA'S COMPLACENT POLITICAL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 20 JAN 2019
DATE/CASE ID: 08 JUN 2007 200504156

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3. (C) FOLLOWING HIS ELECTION, THE FORMER LIEUTENANT COLONEL AND LEADER OF THE FAILED FEBRUARY 1992 COUP ATTEMPT, IMMEDIATELY SOUGHT TO ADDRESS CONCERNS ABOUT HIS COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY AND HIS ACCEPTABILITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. DURING HIS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH, HE REACHED OUT TO ADVERSARIES, PROMISED NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF A HARD-HITTING AND OFTENTIMES DIRTY CAMPAIGN, AND PROCLAIMED HIS COMMITMENT TO PEACEFUL, DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL CHANGE. CHAVEZ THEN BEGAN A SERIES OF TRIPS TO LATIN AMERICA (BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, CHILE, COLOMBIA, MEXICO, AND LATER, CUBA), EUROPE (SPAIN, FRANCE, GERMANY, AND ITALY), AND CANADA TO UNDERScore ACCEPTANCE BY MAJOR TRADE PARTNERS IN THE REGION AND THE WORLD.

WHAT CHAVEZ WANTS FROM THIS TRIP
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4. (C) THE TRIP TO THE U.S., AND THE MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CLINTON, IS THE CAPSTONE OF HIS TRAVELS. COMING JUST DAYS BEFORE HIS FEBRUARY 2 INAUGURATION, IT IS ALSO THE LAUNCHING PAD FOR HIS PRESIDENCY. CHAVEZ WANTS TO ACCOMPLISH THE FOLLOWING DURING HIS STAY:

-- OPEN DIALOGUE WITH THE LEADER OF VENEZUELA'S MOST IMPORTANT ALLY. CHAVEZ FACES DAUNTING POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES. HE NEEDS OUR SUPPORT, AND HE KNOWS THIS. HE WANTS TO BEGIN HIS PRESIDENCY WITH A STRONG SHOW OF INTEREST AND SUPPORT BY THE U.S.

-- LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN ACTIVE AND EXPANSIVE BILATERAL AGENDA. CHAVEZ WANTS FIRST AND FOREMOST TO ENGAGE US ON A BROAD-BASED ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENDA, TO INCLUDE INITIALLY ASSISTANCE FROM US ON CUSTOMS, TAX COLLECTION ISSUES, AND NARCOTICS/MONEY LAUNDERING ISSUES, BUT THEN TO EXTEND TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNABILITY ISSUES. CONCERNED WITH THE DANGER POSED TO VENEZUELA BY DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ORGANIZED CRIME ACTIVITY, HE ENVISIONS LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION AS PART OF HIS ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS.

-- LOOK FOR HELP IN RECONCILING VENEZUELA'S NEED FOR DEEPER ECONOMIC REFORM AND THE SOCIAL NEEDS GENERATED BY ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISIS. CHAVEZ WANTS TO CLAM INVESTOR CONCERNS AND OPEN NEW CHANNELS TO THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS. HE ALSO WANTS THE RESOURCES TO ADDRESS PRESSING PUBLIC HEALTH CARE, EDUCATION, AND SECURITY NEEDS.

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-- AND FINALLY, LAY TO REST FOREVER POLITICAL PROBLEMS CAUSED BY
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HIS INELIGIBILITY FOR VISA. CHAVEZ'S ROLE IN THE FAILED 1992 COUP
ATTEMPT MADE HIM INELIGIBLE FOR A VISA UNDER U.S. LAW. HE WAS
DENIED A VISA IN 1997, PRIOR TO THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. THIS
VISA INELIGIBILITY WAS USED BY HIS OPPONENTS DURING THE CAMPAIGN AS
EVIDENCE THAT CHAVEZ WAS UNACCEPTABLE TO THE U.S. WE REFUSED TO BE
DRAWN INTO THIS QUARREL, RESTRICTING OUR COMMENTS TO EXPLAINING
U.S. LAW. [REDACTED]

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WHAT WE WANT FROM THIS TRIP

5. (C) CHAVEZ IS ATTEMPTING TO CARRY OUT DEEP AND SIGNIFICANT
POLITICAL CHANGE WITHIN A DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK.
THIS IS A UNIQUE AND IMPORTANT FORM OF POLITICAL TRANSITION IN
LATIN AMERICA, AND ITS SUCCESS COULD MAKE SOME OR ALL OF IT A MODEL
FOR OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION FACING SIMILAR ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL PROBLEMS, BUT WITH WEAKER DEMOCRATIC ROOTS. CHAVEZ'S
SUCCESS IS IN OUR INTEREST, AND OUR ABILITY TO ENGAGE CHAVEZ NOW
WILL BE CRUCIAL TO OUR INFLUENCE DURING THE ALL-IMPORTANT FIRST
MONTHS OF HIS PRESIDENCY.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 CARACAS 000184

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HUGO CHAVEZ

6. (C) CHAVEZ'S VISIT WILL SET THE TONE FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP. OUR
GOALS IN THIS VISIT SHOULD BE:

-- DEVELOP PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHAVEZ AND HIS USG
INTERLOCUTORS. CHAVEZ IS PERSONABLE AND CHARISMATIC. HE WILL
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RESPOND POSITIVELY TO THE PRESIDENT AND HIS OTHER INTERLOCUTORS.
ISSUES RAISED DURING THEIR CONVERSATIONS WILL IMMEDIATELY BECOME
THE KEY ISSUES IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP.

-- REINFORCE OUR ENERGY PARTNERSHIP, EXPRESSED BY THE SIGNING OF
THE ENERGY COOPERATION AGREEMENT DURING PRESIDENT CLINTON'S OCTOBER
1997 VISIT TO CARACAS. VENEZUELA IS THE NUMBER ONE SUPPLIER OF
PETROLEUM AND REFINED PRODUCTS TO THE U.S. AND THE TOP GASOLINE
DISTRIBUTOR. U.S. COMPANIES PLAY A KEY ROLE IN VENEZUELA'S OIL
DEVELOPMENT PLAN, AND WE HAVE A WIDE RANGE OF TRADE, INVESTMENT,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERESTS IN THE ENERGY AREA. CHAVEZ WANTS TO
EXPAND THIS PARTNERSHIP, ESPECIALLY IN AREAS OF GAS AND
PETROCHEMICALS.

-- TELL CHAVEZ THAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE SUCCESS OF VENEZUELA'S
NEWLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENT. CHAVEZ WANTS AND NEEDS THIS COMMITMENT.
HE HAS TOLD US THAT VENEZUELA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. IS OF
TRANSCENDENTAL IMPORTANCE, AND THAT HE WANTS TO DO EVERYTHING HE
CAN TO IMPROVE THAT RELATIONSHIP. WE WANT TO DO THE SAME.

-- UNDERScore THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING HIS AGENDA FOR POLITICAL
CHANGE WITHIN A DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK. OUTSIDE
OF THIS FRAMEWORK CHAVEZ WILL ENGENDER INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT AT
HOME, AND UNDERMINE GROWING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT AND GOOD WILL
TOWARD HIS GOVERNMENT. INSIDE THIS FRAMEWORK, HE CAN BE GUARANTEED
OF OUR SUPPORT.

-- RESPOND POSITIVELY TO HIS PLEA FOR ANTI-CORRUPTION ASSISTANCE,
OFFERING TO BEGIN INTERCHANGES TO ADDRESS HIS MOST SERIOUS
PROBLEMS. WE CAN BUILD ON THIS TO INCLUDE OTHER CORRUPTION RELATED
AREAS, ESPECIALLY COUNTERNARCOTICS AND ANTI-ORGANIZED CRIME
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COOPERATION.

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-- EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR CONTINUED ECONOMIC REFORM TO REACTIVATE VENEZUELA'S ECONOMY TO PRODUCE THE EMPLOYMENT AND TAX REVENUE NEEDED TO ADDRESS MAJOR SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

-- PUSH FOR COMPLETION OF KEY OUTSTANDING ITEMS IN THE BILATERAL AGENDA, SUCH AS THE BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY AND THE NEW, COMPREHENSIVE MARITIME COOPERATION AGREEMENT.

-- SEEK VENEZUELA'S VIEWS ON THE PASTRANA GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO END CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA.

ENERGIZING THE RELATIONSHIP

7. (C) CHAVEZ'S VISIT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO ENERGIZE OUR BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW GOVERNMENT. JUST AS PRESIDENT CLINTON'S OCTOBER 1997 VISIT TO CARACAS DRAMATICALLY ADVANCED KEY U.S. INTERESTS--ESPECIALLY IN THE TRADE, ENERGY, AND COUNTERNARCOTICS AREAS--SO THIS VISIT CAN PUSH OUR RELATIONSHIP TO EVEN MORE IMPORTANT LEVELS. CHAVEZ'S LARGE ELECTORAL MANDATE, THE POPULAR CLAMOR FOR CHANGE, AND THE PROPOSED REWRITING OF THE CONSTITUTION OPEN IMPORTANT AREAS OF INFLUENCE FOR US. WORKING WITH THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT, WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO OVERCOME NARROW, CLIENTELISTIC INTERESTS WHICH HAVE PREVIOUSLY HELD BACK SEVERAL OF OUR INITIATIVES. TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, WE WILL BE "PRESENT AT THE CREATION." THIS VISIT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER OUR PRESENCE IS AS SPECTATOR OR PARTICIPANT.

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